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Bishop Ranch's efforts keep 9,000 cars off road

By Scott Marshall
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SAN RAMON - Commuters who take transit or car pools to Bishop Ranch business park immediately recognize Marci McGuire.

She's their travel agent, their professor of schedules.

One by one, McGuire has convinced, coaxed, even lured about 1,500 Bishop Ranch workers out of their cars and onto mass transit. She has guided about 1,000 of those onto express buses to and from mass transit.

The leader for seven years of the Bishop Ranch Transportation Centre, she knows many of those workers by name. And almost all know "Marci."

Thanks in large measure to McGuire, more than 30 percent of Bishop Ranch's roughly 35,000 employees take buses to work from BART stations in Walnut Creek and Dublin or the Altamont Commuter Express (ACE) station in Pleasanton; ride to work with someone else; or van-pool, bike or walk to their jobs. Their decision not to commute alone means 9,000 fewer vehicles travel Interstate 680 daily, air quality experts estimate.

A true believer in transit, McGuire goes to great lengths to get people riding. She calls on workers at their cubicles to deliver their transit tickets; one month alone, she sold \$10,000 worth. Every six months, she hands out dozens of boxfuls of free express-bus passes -- about \$900 worth for each Bishop Ranch worker each year.

McGuire meets hundreds of people when she sets up a "transit table" at Bishop Ranch events, and she'll recommend an individual commute route for each one using an array of transit providers. Last year, McGuire said, she received 5,000 calls from workers at the 585-acre office park, which includes 9 million square feet of commercial space.

Bishop Ranch and the nearby Hacienda business park in Pleasanton are two of only 12 "Best Workplaces for Commuters" the federal Environmental Protection Agency has designated nationwide. Only 69.4 percent of Bishop Ranch workers commute alone, compared with 80 percent at Hacienda, which doesn't provide services that Bishop Ranch's 22-year-old transportation center does.

Elizabeth Deakin, a professor of city and regional planning at UC Berkeley, said McGuire oversees a national model for coordinating commuters.

"It's probably the best in the country," said Deakin, director of the University of California Transportation Research Center.

Melting pots

In addition to the express shuttles, Bishop Ranch sees 54 County Connection roundtrip buses daily: Five go to the ACE station, 19 to the Dublin-Pleasanton BART state and 30 to Walnut Creek BART.

One recent evening. McGuire was checking in with commuters on the shuttle to ACE, which they board to get home to San Joaquin County.

"This is the first time that public transit has worked for me," said Susan Gall, setting out on her journey home to Ripon. It saves a lot of wear and tear on her Toyota Solara, which already has traveled 150,000 miles.

"My car is happy," Gall said.

So too are humans such as Laura Miller, who works in shipping at ChevronTexaco and commutes from San Leandro to Bishop Ranch. "It's so convenient because, especially in the morning, you can see from the freeway everything is blocked."

Miller rides an express bus to BART and then takes BART to San Leandro.

The buses have become melting pots where everyone from entry-level employees to managers makes friends. They get dates, find new jobs, read or sleep in designated low-lighted snooze zones.

Graduate students of Deakin's studied express bus services that take commuters to and from train systems when transportation officials were surprised by the buses' success.

"We discovered that major employers had figured it out," Deakin said.

Several services

In the Bay Area, more than 800 shuttle services help workers travel the first and last miles of their commutes.

"The common thread here is that they are local services designed to meet specific local needs, and so they've all grown up organically," said Bruce Riordan, an East Bay transportation consultant. Cities, too, are getting more involved in this kind of planning, he said.

Bishop Ranch tenant companies get into the act, too, with rewards for employees who use mass transit or walk to work. The Sunset Development Co., ChevronTexaco and San Ramon Marriott also contribute to the Bishop Ranch Transportation Association and help fund the express bus system, McGuire said. The companies advertise it as a perk.

"In interviews, people have said they might have trouble getting here," said Lisa Arcieri, human resources manager at Security Alarm Financing Enterprises. Bishop Ranch is halfway between Walnut Creek and Pleasanton.

"I tell them: If you do, we have free buss passes, discounts and services," Arcieri said. "How many other companies could offer this type of (benefit) to employees?"

BISHOP RANCH EXPRESS

Buses to Bishop Ranch from BART's Walnut Creek and Dublin-Pleasanton stations and the Altamont Commuter Express train are free for thousands of employees at Bishop Ranch; \$1.75 one way for the public.

For details, call Bishop Ranch Transportation Centre, 925-830-0101 or visit www.bishopranch.com/

[services/brtc.html](#).

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